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Right to education (articles 13 and 14 of the Covenant)

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Considerations on indicators of the right to education

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I. PRINCIPLES

1. As a result of the growing interest in the practical implementation of human rights, emphasis has been placed on the various aspects of the right to education, to which attention is frequently drawn in international documents. The practical actions which contribute to the realization of this right, which is legally recognized at the international level, are thus being carefully considered and their meaning and significance assessed.

2. Education is increasingly being confirmed as a key factor in the harmonious political, economic, social and cultural development of human beings and societies. It is increasingly being recognized as an essential and basic requirement for pushing back poverty, exclusion and lack of understanding, for promoting the ideals of democracy, peace and social justice and for halting oppression and war.

3. Education has also been called into question and reforms have been adopted as a result of rapid economic, scientific and technological developments. Education is increasingly being regarded as an institution for social change and political, scientific and economic renewal. Trying to change education means reconsidering its objectives and taking account of new philosophical approaches and changes in values, as well as each country's particular context and traditions. It also means establishing a new type of relationship between school and society, a new kind of partnership, in order to help create a social environment that is more conducive to the exercise of democracy, freedom and individual responsibilities. The type of education chosen reflects the choices a society has made.

4. There are many international documents which deal with this problem, starting with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the two related Covenants (see A. Fernández and S. Jenkner, "International Declarations and Conventions on the Right to Education and Freedom of Education").

5. In order to exercise the right to education fully, it is becoming more and more important to evaluate the realization of this right objectively and to review and improve the indicators that should make it possible to increase its effectiveness. In view of the nature of education and the complexity of the factors involved, however, this is not an easy task. It is relatively easier, for example, to identify the level of investment, public expenditure per student, unit costs for the State, parents and schools, the number of persons attending school, the percentage of illiterates, drop-out and graduation rates, the student-teacher ratio, the age and qualifications of the teaching staff, the costs of direct educational services and support services, trends and projections of numbers of teachers, etc. In many cases, statistical parameters help to narrow down the elements to be considered and to take account of the broader problems of schools, social life and development, which have to be interpreted in the light of data taken from a number of sectors (see, for example, studies on inequality of opportunity according to social origin, etc.). The prerequisite for all these studies is, of course, the existence of reliable statistics. A good example of the use of quantitative factors to describe the various aspects of education is to be

found in the studies of educational situations contained in publications by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (see, for example, "OECD Indicators", OECD, Paris, 1997).

6. In addition to quantifiable, measurable and material indicators, a number of non-quantifiable factors and indicators with subjective aspects have to be considered in order to assess the implementation of the right to development. This might, moreover, involve risks of an interpretation that is much too incomplete and partial. Such judgements may easily vary according to country and region. If this approach is not counterbalanced by a concern for broad-based consultation and references to generally recognized values, it may, if taken too far, lead to exacerbated ethnocentricity, nationalism, violence, attitudes contrary to traditional humanism or a definite influence "party politics". The aim would be above all to indicate as objectively as possible which values shared by every democratic culture are imparted by education, what types of behaviour are agreed on and how the human being is to develop fully in all his richness and in all the complexity of his expressions, his commitments, his aesthetic sense, his spirituality, etc.

7. In view of the progress made in all areas of human development, the increase in growth and the wide variety of factors which are involved, as well as their interconnection, interdependence and interference, it is essential to narrow the studies down and go beyond exclusively quantitative justifications.

8. Because of the globalization of problems and their scope, interrelationship, seriousness and urgency, moreover, the world around us can be interpreted only in global terms. Complex reality cannot be approached only in terms of its components taken separately and analysed only by means of traditional methodological tools. It is a mixture of order and disorder and of the rational and the irrational. It requires global responses, a set of objective measures and subjective approaches based on imagination, creativity, intuition and sensitivity, as well as on widely accepted humanist and ethical concepts. Reality, which is characterized by rapid and ongoing change, and the future, which is uncertain, call for complex and rapid responses, as well as action at the international level. For example, environmental pollution, the depletion of natural resources, population growth and the poverty in which much of the world lives can no longer be seen only from one single country's point of view.

9. In the circumstances, the hopes pinned on education increase rapidly, and so does the number of educational reforms. There is, however, a tendency to overestimate the role of education and to demand that it should provide solutions to the world's problems, to relations between individuals and societies, to democratic development and to social justice.

10. No matter what the political, economic and financial factors involved, educational policies are called on to play an irreplaceable role in preparations for the future and in the transition to the new century. They and the changes they bring about in education are regarded as "an ongoing process of the enrichment of knowledge and know-how, but also and above all as an opportunity for the improvement of human beings and relations among

individuals, groups and nations" (report of the UNESCO International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century (Delors Commission), p. 10*).

11. To be effective, education policies have to give a clear idea of the long-term objectives to be achieved which is, in the immediate term, based on the aims of education and the available resources. They also require a systemic approach and the harmonization and integration of the various sources of education available in school and outside. They guarantee the link with sustainable development, provide the means of ensuring that human rights are made known and respected and guarantee the wise use of all of society's educational resources. It is to be hoped that educational planning and management will meet the requirements of society and the economy and contribute to the maintenance and renewal of the labour force in order to make educational strategies operational.

12. The discussion thus focuses on the future development of education from the point of view of scientific achievements and the identification of the factors likely to evaluate and influence such development. Continuing efforts are being made to analyse indicators of progress in achieving the educational ideal.

13. Since it is impossible to define all of the requirements that education is expected to meet, there is a growing tendency to try to define minimum quantities and qualities and the minimum content of concepts resulting from a consensus reached by the international community (see, for example, the documents adopted by the United Nations, governmental and non-governmental international organizations, etc.) and by national communities. These efforts are also designed to identify scientific tools for the measurement of results in relation to shared objectives determined by democratic practices.

II. SUCCESS IN EDUCATION FOR SUCCESS IN THE FUTURE

14. Education is supposed to awaken the curiosity of children, make them more observant, introduce them to basic categories of logic, encourage them to be intellectually rigorous, teach them to analyse the logical and grammatical structures of language and audiovisual messages and, above all, enable them to control their own destinies and take part freely in the development of society by becoming aware of how it is changing. It is thus supposed to transmit the know-how and abilities necessary to build the Delors Commission's four pillars of education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and to live with others and learning to be. In addition to the usual measuring tools, which have already been well developed by a wealth of scientific research, the aim is to develop the ability to measure and evaluate today's basic skills, which are the foundation for the full and complete development of the human personality, individual skills and talents and intellectual, moral and aesthetic qualities. It is important to develop and, consequently, to be able to evaluate positive attitudes to issues such as mutual understanding, tolerance and democratic pluralism.

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* Learning: The Treasure Within, UNESCO, Paris, 1996.

15. In the world of information and communication, it has become essential to be able to find specific data required for the achievement of a particular objective and to select, compare, analyse and rank such data. Priority thus goes more to abilities and types of behaviour than to the storage of encyclopaedic knowledge to be evaluated.

16. Rapid social change introduces an element of uncertainty about the common fate of mankind and the development to be shared by all inhabitants of the planet. One new type of behaviour will be to learn to overcome the feeling of uncertainty. Education will have to teach us to live with this idea, to deal with and handle the unexpected and to be able to adapt flexibly to new situations. It is becoming increasingly important to develop a sense of solidarity and the ability to settle conflicts, and social and moral crises; and to accept diversity and make it a positive factor for mutual enrichment and understanding. It goes without saying that understanding of the world and of others makes it possible to understand oneself better.

III. RIGHT TO EDUCATION, DEVELOPMENT AND INDICATORS OF INTERDEPENDENCE

17. Questions about education relate basically to what it is and where it is going. The new issue of human development has to define its objectives and there has to be an in-depth analysis of the many relationships and the interdependence between education and other manifestations of the changes now taking place in the world. It may be asked whether we really should refer to ongoing education and the duty to study throughout one's life and to what extent a good education based on the humanist ideals of our time is a utopia for which no justification exists. In fact, it is internationally agreed that the primary role of education is to enable mankind to decide its own fate and its development and to contribute to the progress of the societies in which the members take part in a responsible manner.

18. Education must therefore be regarded and judged as part of a complex set of interdependent and interrelated problems. The measurement and evaluation of interdependence and interrelationships requires new approaches and new instruments. As far as development is concerned, education is just one of many means, but it becomes one of the constituent elements and one of the basic objectives (Delors report, p.84). The purpose of education should therefore be to open the doors of the future to harmonious development built on sound moral foundations, with mankind as its focus.

IV. EDUCATION AND THE ECONOMY

19. The relationship between education and the economy has always attracted the attention of researchers and decision makers, particularly in times of crisis and structural adjustment. This relationship has never been restricted to the funding of education and a study of the available financial resources. The indicators have become more precise and reflect the level of resources invested in education: unit costs per student, per school, per level of instruction and in relation to gross domestic product, the geographical distribution of resources, the quantification of relations between students and teachers, etc.

20. However, it must be borne in mind that:

(a) Although philosophical theories at the beginning of the century tried to focus attention on the immediate effect of education on economic development and the rapid integration of pupils in the production process in order to obtain a direct effect and an economic return from education, the trend nowadays is to go beyond the purely utilitarian "economist's" approach to education, which considers only the many effects of economic factors on educational objectives. Education is no longer intended for human beings only as agents of production and development, but as the object and purpose of development. The importance of investments therefore has to be assessed in terms of the overall development of human capital.

(b) Demand for education for economic purposes means analysing the role of investments in the training of the workforce. However, it is still very important to evaluate their consequences for the training of human capital and its full development, as well as for the training of economic agents capable of using new technologies that involve an element of innovation and new skills, including moral and ethical ones, as opposed to robotization and the reproduction of mechanical acts.

(c) The economic evaluation should therefore focus on the educational factors which ensure economic growth, but also guarantee better quality and more flexible manpower. It would also be useful to evaluate the relationship between the quality of education and time spent in school (duration) by comparison with the level of return on investments in the various components of the educational process.

21. There is very little research or analysis on the level of investment in the quality of education compared with studies of the "quantity" of education. Moreover, few studies analyse the economic efficiency of resources invested in new technologies in schools or in educational aims and methods. Very little research has been done on the economic criteria for, or the economic results expected from, educational reforms, decisions on the direction of education or the alternatives that are technically possible.

22. The same applies to economic bench marks that would make it possible to define the size and type of investment that is likely to give the best results, the level of return on vocational training or the economic efficiency of different syllabuses (inter alia).

23. The misconception that ongoing education is merely a process of helping labour to adjust to new working conditions is disappearing.

24. There are practically no studies on the changing nature of work, its "dematerialization", its effect on education or its economic characteristics.

25. There is still a lack of economic studies analysing the economic cost of educational reforms geared to social justice and wider access to education and knowledge. It is not possible to see education as an agent of free, genuinely equitable development without assessing what resources need to be mobilized in order to ensure development of that kind in the future.

26. The economic cost of corrective measures to ensure equality of access to education (grants, vouchers, loans, etc.) is worth more detailed analysis, as is the cost in terms of social services.

27. The economic return on educational management reforms has not yet been measured with the necessary scientific rigour. We have no objective economic criteria for evaluating, for example, the cost of the various options used in managing secondary education or the investments that would make it possible to deal with the instability of employment opportunities and the unregulated dynamics of the market.

28. In addition, insufficient progress has been made with studies of the economic criteria for educational funding and economic burden-sharing, and their social implications (e.g., what share would be borne by central financing, decentralized financing, private financing, etc.).

V. EDUCATION AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

29. It is now self-evident that educational choices are social choices and the exclusive preserve of society itself. It is therefore essential to create the conditions needed to guarantee those choices and open up a genuine democratic debate on the nature and aims of education and the resources that society can make available to education.

30. A large number of studies describe the crises in society and morality as consequences of social policy and public opinion as reflected in the educational system. That could also explain why student movements are to be found in so many countries. However, recent criticisms of educational systems must be seen as part of a particularly difficult historical, economic and sociological context. They cannot be assigned to a purely educational context. Thus, the problems are necessarily linked with past educational practice and a specific social context and it is therefore important to know what historical, economic, social and political factors influence education, in order to make a more objective evaluation of the crisis in education and look for appropriate solutions.

31. It is therefore necessary to look at social differences within educational systems and find means of reinforcing social justice and equity in education and enhancing the various expressions of the right to education. Indicators such as participation rates at the various levels and in the various forms of education, educational achievement, public expenditure per student, inequality of access, access to higher education and further studies and the persistence of practices that discriminate against groups or segments of the population eligible for education then take on a particular importance for social development, one that far exceeds their quantitative significance.

32. Clearly, education can become, on the one hand, a major force for social cohesion and equalization and for long-term preparation for a common future and, on the other, an expression of problems such as polarization within a country or between industrially developed countries and developing countries. In addition, it may represent the de facto realization of various freedoms (e.g. constitutional freedoms, academic freedoms, the autonomy of educational institutions), but may also have a positive contribution to make in overcoming

exclusion, poverty, marginalization and, in some countries, ethnic, linguistic, religious and tribal barriers, inter alia, between groups.

33. Similarly, education can be usefully applied in solving urgent social problems such as violence and unemployment, in restricting privileges associated with nationality or race, and in helping to replace antagonism and confrontation by dialogue and an exchange of views in order to bring about national consensus, non-violent solutions and strengthening of democratic values, etc. It is therefore essential to be in a position to define the precise role of education in this area as well, though the use of suitable indicators.

34. The democratization of education is primarily a function of its breadth of coverage, its availability to all, the existence of human rights and whether and how far they are respected, the development of democratic citizenship and the reinforcement of democratic values. Other criteria are the progressive introduction of free education and the extent to which it benefits from a range of social services or positive discrimination arrangements. However, the democratization of education cannot be defined by a single formula or set of formulas that is expected to provide a miracle solution or to be a panacea in all situations and contexts.

35. Assessing the full importance for social development of gender equality at school requires more than statistics and quantitative data: it would naturally require - without going into detail - an analysis, using appropriate methods, of how women's education contributes to health, food and nutrition, child-rearing, etc.

36. The democratization of society and of the school throw into relief the role of diversification and the much-needed increase in the number of partners in the educational process, as well as the need to evaluate their new roles and potential level of participation. The first area to look at and evaluate would be teachers' and parents' new roles.

37. The democratic participation of all those involved in making decisions and in implementing and evaluating those decisions, whether individuals or communities, local authorities, extended school services, non-governmental organizations, teachers and students - in short, the whole range of partners - ensures the success of the educational strategies used in all educational reforms.

38. In a context of democratic participation, the State assumes new functions in the sphere of education which must be carefully analysed and brought to public notice. Examples would be the State's response to the need for uniform regulation of the education system as a whole and its role as a social mediator in establishing new requirements for education, adopting minimum educational standards, harmonizing educational action, etc. The State has an essential part to play in guaranteeing the right to education for minorities and for indigenous peoples and in safeguarding linguistic freedoms (for more detail, see the publications of the International Organization for

the Development of Freedom of Education (OIDEL) and Paul Hunt's study entitled "State obligations, benchmarks and the right to education" (1998) and others in the select bibliography*).

39. Without democratic control, State intervention may become petty and restrictive or imbue education with a particular political philosophy or even start conditioning students.

VI. EDUCATION AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

40. Mountains of research and writings and seas of ink have been devoted to the relationship between culture and education. There is no need to review that relationship here. Nevertheless, a number of questions remain unanswered: have we found ways and means of guaranteeing a genuinely pluralist, multicultural education that reflects the multi-ethnic nature of the world? Do we have reliable criteria for measuring the interaction of education, culture and the economy in order to create a process of development in which the human being is both actor and end product? Are there any indicators showing the universal values that education should develop in order to promote a global ethic and build the bridges of understanding and tolerance between different cultures and civilizations?

41. It is still necessary, in the meantime, to pursue and develop research into the relationship between the right to education and cultural roots; and into the role of education in respect for and the preservation of cultures and national unity and in the harmonious integration of economic, cultural, humanistic and ethical dimensions into development.

42. The emergence and dominance of the information society are fresh challenges to the right to education. How can information and knowledge be accessed without discrimination, how can they be analysed and selected? How can the wealth of individual cultures be reconciled with the trend towards the standardization of cultural models, spiritual values and ethical and behavioural considerations transmitted by the communications media?

43. How can education move beyond the notion that the media are basically means of facilitating learning and of transmitting and distributing knowledge and know-how in order to turn them to account and begin to improve our very approach to knowledge in order to develop analytical abilities, initiative and the sense of responsibility? How can the danger of public opinion being manipulated be reduced and removed?

44. Information technology and access to the virtual world can sometimes reduce the sense of reality. The right to education leads to a good knowledge of the world around us and enables us to integrate into it sensibly, but that requires suitable educational approaches.

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* The bibliography is available for consultation in the Committee secretariat.

VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

45. The right to education makes new demands. It points up the need to develop, on an interdisciplinary base, new measures and corresponding indicators in line with the rapid development of science, but also following the criteria and benchmarks established by the international community and by consensus within the United Nations and United Nations bodies. These indicators would of necessity have to be multidisciplinary and multidimensional.

46. It would be useful to gain a deeper understanding of international benchmarks and of the typology of interventions beneficial to the right to education; and to study their short-term and long-term impact, particularly as regards their economic, social and cultural components and the preservation of equality in diversity.

47. Economic realities and budget constraints are a limiting factor and constitute a major obstacle to the development of educational systems as a whole and the enjoyment of education rights. It is therefore necessary not only to understand them, but also to know how to evaluate their long-term consequences using new indicators in order to avoid an outcome that runs counter to the objectives and to be able to respond to the demands of an economy in the throes of enormous upheavals.

48. Expenditure indicators should not be confined to showing the level of investment in education, but should also incorporate data on health, nutrition, the standard of living, the implementation of legal provisions, disparities among different groups and between the sexes, etc.

49. The concern to reform education in such a way as to incorporate recent data on development entails far-reaching changes in the structure and content of education. Now would be a good time to consider making further adjustments to the scientific content and the humanist and democratic values of behaviour patterns and to investigate the establishment of a continuum of renewed, renewable learning and skills (knowledge and know-how) in order to meet the need to be able to cope with tomorrow's uncertainties.

50. Characteristic of educational reforms are the number and variety of solutions devised to take account of the historical, economic, cultural and linguistic differences peculiar to each country. However, all such reforms must aim to produce an educating society capable, throughout each individual's life, of offering access to the means of controlling his destiny, helping to evaluate and guide development, including the development of education, and to integrate without difficulty into the society in which he lives.

51. The modern world is characterized by great linguistic diversity, which reflects its cultural diversity. Multilingualism is a reality in the vast majority of States and monolingual, mono-ethnic situations are the exception. Nevertheless, this diversity should not be a major obstacle to educational activities and even less so to the enjoyment of the right to education. The problem is not linguistic (the stage of a language's development) or demographic (minority-majority), but one of language status and of the hierarchical structure of functions. Those functions are a catalyst for the

forces that come into play in the political and economic system. It is obvious that, because of their instrumental, cultural and affective role for political, economic, social and cultural reasons, the use of languages (national or foreign) requires special attention and consideration not only of language's potential in the educational process, but also of the whole range of external factors that might influence decisions.

52. The enjoyment of the right to education should also take account of the fact that the society that is taking shape reflects the rapid changes taking place in all spheres in the context of internationalization and globalization. However, the reforms will be made effective not through the implementation of uniform programmes brought in from elsewhere, but through participation and initiative, backed up by diversity and competition that have grown up in freedom and respect for ethical and humanist values.

53. At this point, we should recall some of the factors that can make a decisive contribution to the success of educational reforms and the realization of the right to education. They include:

(a) The overriding need to have laid the foundation of a democratic society, which can ensure that global action will be taken and is the outcome of conscious, active participation by all concerned - a society which functions through many varied forms of collaboration, which is able to reach consensus and formulate objectives and in which new synergies can emerge;

(b) The harmonization and rational use of the full range of a society's educational resources (within or outside the educational system); flexibility and coordination;

(c) The regular analysis of trends in the variables that may contribute to the enjoyment of the right of education;

(d) The adoption of new kinds of action and indicators defined by democratic processes (e.g. the setting up of multicultural projects);

(e) A judicious, balanced choice of scientific contents and ethical and humanistic values;

(f) Prioritization of actions targeting:

(i) Specific population groups (young children, women and girls, indigenous peoples, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities, inhabitants of rural areas, deprived groups, the disabled, etc.);

(ii) Major educational problems (literacy, efforts to combat educational wastage, the introduction of technologies and modern methods, education technology as a tool and a teaching technique, distance learning, etc.);

(g) Making use of international collaborative efforts (information exchanges, agreements with international institutions - the United Nations

and its specialized agencies, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations - a variety of modalities of assistance, etc.).

54. Conscious effort and in-depth analysis of the interplay and interdependence of the various parameters will make it possible to build the school of the future: one of social solidarity, economic autonomy and cultural creativity. The school whose basic objectives include the desire to shape or change individual or collective attitudes to otherness; to eliminate the danger of marginalization and exclusion; and to maintain social cohesion. It will have achieved its objectives if it succeeds in improving the enjoyment of the right to education. We must build an education system that is capable of making a valid contribution to the development of the human being and "whose aim is the full flowering of man in all his richness and in the complexity of his expressions and obligations: individual, member of a family and of a community, citizen and producer, inventor of techniques and maker of dreams" ("Learning to Be", report of the International Commission on the Development of Education (Faure report), UNESCO, Paris, 1972). Is it not a wonderful thing to dream?

Annex

SUGGESTED RESEARCH LEADS FOR EXPLORATION IN THE FUTURE

1. Right to education: freedoms and responsibilities (individual and collective; citizenship); problems of participation; right of access to knowledge.

2. Right to education and to development; social dimensions; rights of solidarity.

3. Right to education and economic aspects: financing social equity; labour law and the labour market; cost of education for society and the individual; State's role in financing education in time of crisis.

4. Ethical (moral, humanist) aspects of the right to education.

5. Right to education and cultural roots.

6. Right to education and the use of the full range of society's educational resources; evaluation and recognition of experience, knowledge and know-how acquired outside the educational system.

7. How to devise coordinated strategies for the educational services and ensure the complementarity of the different types and levels of school (e.g., general and vocational education; secondary and higher education; State and private education).

8. Right to education and languages of education; economic, social and cultural aspects of the introduction of the mother tongue (national language, language of communication) into teaching.

9. Freedom of education and ability to innovate; ability to anticipate; ability to select and analyse information.

10. Evaluation of the implementation of the right to education: research into criteria; indicators; indivisibility and interdependence of human rights.

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